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tical as well as the theoretical side of his profession as a modern language teacher.

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### THE SACHSENSPIEGEL.

*Die Reimvorreden des Sachsenspiegels.* VON GUSTAV ROETHE. Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse. Neue Folge, Band II, No. 8. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung. 1899. 4to, pp. 110.

THE modest title of Roethe's treatise hardly suggests its rich contents. The discussion of the rhymed preface to the *Sachsenspiegel* forms only the introductory part of an investigation into questions of far-reaching importance. It concerns a field in which comparatively little has been accomplished so far: the Middle Low German period. However simple the explanation for this apparent neglect may be—in the main it rests upon certain utilitarian considerations, the interrelation between university work and the secondary school programme—from a purely scientific point of view this disregard for a literature however inferior but none the less pertinent for questions of literary influences and linguistic development is very much to be regretted. What little there has been done is due, in the main, to the activity of the *Verein für Niederdeutsche Sprachforschung*, and it is a hopeful sign that another academic teacher has turned his attention to this subject.

What Homeyer, the jurist, had been unable to decide upon, Roethe establishes beyond a doubt: the two parts of the rhymed preface (vv. 1-96, and 97-230) are the work of two authors, differing in personality and in their technique. The rhymed couplets (Part II) only can be attributed to Eike von Repgow. These couplets thus offer the starting point for a most thorough investigation into the language of the author.

Eike was a Low German; his *Sachsenspiegel* recorded the laws as evolved among his countrymen. It would have been but natural

to employ the dialect of his native land if the vernacular had at that time developed a literary language; but this condition was lacking. To become the founder of a new literary language Eike did not possess the requisite creative genius; his mind was that of the reasoning jurist, content with committing the statutes to writing, but stopping short of the other difficult problem, that of the literary use of a purely Low German language.

Eike's work with its peculiarly mixed speech offers the same problem that has been a *crux* to the interpreters of the *Hildebrandslied*, of Veldeke and Wizlav—to mention only these typical cases. The *Sachsenspiegel* might have been written down in Low German and lost its original habitus during the long process of copying and reworking into a southern idiom; it might have been first committed to writing in High German and found acceptance among Low Germans only in a Saxon garb. Neither of these suppositions leads to satisfactory results. There is a third possibility: the author divested his language of local peculiarities and approached it to the neighboring High (Middle) German dialect, avoiding what might have been unintelligible to his countrymen. And this procedure was no innovation on the part of Eike; it was an evolution starting with the earliest Low German authors and leaving its imprint on the literary productions up to about 1300. They all show the same characteristics—a tempered language that is neither Low nor High German. When with the beginning of the fourteenth century the Saxon dialect is gradually raised to a poetical language, it shows till its final decline, with the introduction of the reformation, the traces of its former bondage.

A full enumeration of the arguments brought forward by Roethe cannot be attempted here. I must content myself with this brief *exposé* of the keynote of his contention. That the whole array of proofs and assumptions will stand the test of further research nobody will claim; the personal equation is discernible here and there.

The scantiness of the available reliable text material—the *Sachsenspiegel* edition itself leaves much to be wished for—and our meagre sources of the cultural conditions of that

period in the North perhaps put some arguments in the wrong place, or at least leave some theories open to further discussion. Thus, for instance, Roethe's belief that the imitation of High German, and the consequent absence of specifically Low German forms, was an unconscious process, that it more or less forced itself on the Low German writers, is not fully substantiated. Similarly, it seems that the later period—the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—was ushered in by a more conscious effort on the part of northern poets. If the people had at that time reached a higher educational level, and took sufficient interest in official transactions to necessitate the substitution of the mother tongue for the learned Latin, the mere inertia that gradually introduces the vernacular into literary use hardly explains the change of conditions, even if coupled with the fact that literary productivity in the South was on the wane. Be that as it may—so far only theory against theory!—these objections do not touch the main issue. Roethe has certainly succeeded in formulating the problem and pointing the way that is to lead the editor of Middle Low German texts, and the historian of mediæval North German literature, out of baffling perplexities. I do not hesitate to call Roethe's work the most important contribution to Germanics within the last years. Attention might, in this connection, be called also to Carl Kraus, *Heinrich von Veldeke und die mittelhochdeutsche Dichtersprache*, Halle, 1899, and Wrede, *Die Heimat der altsächsischen Bibeldichtung*, *Z.f.d.A.* xliii, p. 333, and *ibid.* *Anzeiger*, p. 387.

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#### SCOTTISH LITERATURE.

*The Wallace and the Bruce Restudied.* J. T. T. BROWN. Bonn: 1900 (*Bonner Beiträge*).

ALL students of the two Scottish national epics have been perplexed by certain difficulties connected with the authorship and integrity of the texts, which editors have never satisfactorily cleared up. The present work is an attempt to explain these anomalies by the help of a somewhat startling theory.

First, as to the facts

The *Wallace* has been preserved to us in a unique MS. bearing the colophon: "Explicit vita . . . Willielmi Wallace militis per me Johannem Ramsay anno domini 1488." As Ramsay was the scribe of the MS. of the *Bruce* which is included in the same volume and subscribed "raptim scriptus per me Johannem Ramsay," and also presumed to be that of the Cambridge *Bruce*, subscribed "per manum J. de R., capellani"; and as these three MSS. are said to be in the same handwriting, it has always been supposed that Ramsay was simply a copyist. The authorship of the *Bruce* was known; that of the *Wallace* was assigned by ancient tradition (apparently never questioned till now) to Blind Harry, or Henry the Minstrel, though no mention of the author's name occurs in the book itself.

That there was such a person as Blind Harry living in the reign of James IV, there is no doubt. There are entries of small gifts to him from the royal treasury, and he is mentioned among dead poets by Dunbar (*circ.* 1508). John Maior says that he was blind from his birth, that in the time of his (Maior's) infancy he fashioned (*cudit*) a book of the deeds of Wallace, *carmine vulgari*, and that he earned his food and clothing by reciting stories—*historiarum recitatione*—before noblemen. From these facts it is clear that Harry was one of the wandering minstrels, at once poet and beggar; and this has been the invariable tradition. The "stories" which Maior says he recited are supposed to have been portions of the *Wallace*.

Straight as this story seems, there are difficulties in the way. It is hard to think that a wandering beggar who could not write, could compose and hold in memory a continuous epic of nearly 12,000 lines. It is still harder to understand how a man blind from his birth should have such clear impressions of natural objects, and such minute knowledge of Lowland topography, both east and west. Even stranger than this is his familiarity with books, such as Chaucer and the romance writers. He even implies a knowledge of Latin by asserting that he drew much of his material

1 Mr. Brown's translation. *Cudit*, however, means "printed," from which it would seem that Maior thought the edition of Myllar and Chepman, 1508, to have been the original form.